



# EMPIRE

## BRIEFS

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### FOUR CORNERS

## EPA pinpoints pollutants

Old mine tailings are one cause of the high levels of mercury found in some Montezuma County reservoirs, the Environmental Protection Agency said.

Mines around Rico, Dunton and La Plata are principal sources of mercury, according to an EPA report. About 10 percent of the mercury had been airborne, perhaps blowing here from Four Corners and San Juan coal-fired power plants.

McPhee, Narraguinnep and Totten reservoirs near Dolores and Cortez have had signs posted warning of high levels of mercury in the fish for more than a decade, but the EPA's recently released draft report summarizes the first comprehensive attempt to identify its sources. Mercury can form an organic compound called methylmercury that builds up in the tissues of fish and the animals that eat them, causing central nervous system damage.

The mercury load at McPhee is about 2% times the standard set by the Clean Water Act.